

AGENDA ITEM #
July 12, 2002

To: Delta Protection Commission

From: Margit Aramburu, Executive Director

Subject: Update on Highway 160 Guardrail Project, Sacramento County

Background:

CalTrans has been developing a guardrail project along approximately 22 miles of State Highway 160 from Courtland (where the existing guardrail ends) to Sherman Island where the Highway leaves the levee and travels through the middle of the Island. The guardrail will be on the water side of the roadway only. The guardrail will be located two feet inboard from the "hinge point" of the levee; in some locations that is right next to the paved area. CalTrans approved a categorical exemption for the project in 1999.

The need for the project is based on evaluation of accident data. The rate of accidents per millions miles driven on Highway 160 is below normal; the number of injuries is below normal; however, the rate of deaths associated with accidents is above normal. The project report assumes that the deaths are associated with cars going into the Sacramento River.

Status of Reclamation Board Approvals:

The project needs an encroachment permit from the State Reclamation Board; that permit was issued in June 2001. The permit included Condition #26 which states "The permittee (CalTrans) shall enter into a memorandum of Understanding with the Reclamation Board prior to start of construction of the proposed project. This memorandum shall bring resolution, satisfactory to The Reclamation Board, to unresolved issues concerning the effect on levee operations, maintenance, and repair due to implementation of the proposed project." Although several meetings were held in May and June, the issues raised by the affected Reclamation Districts have not yet been resolved, and there is no signed Memorandum of Understanding between The Reclamation Board and CalTrans.

CalTrans has notified The Reclamation Board of its intent to have a contractor start work on the project on July 8, 2002 due to the need to protect public safety.

Highway 160 Corridor Planning:

When the Commission considered this project, staff was directed to assist in developing a planning process for the entire Highway 160 Corridor through the Delta including Sacramento and Yolo Counties. Staff has been unable to identify funding sources to carry out this planning process but will renew its efforts this fiscal year to seek funds and develop a community based process as was developed for the Highway 12 Corridor from Rio Vista, Solano County to Lodi, San Joaquin County.

The Highway 12 planning process was started when then Assemblymember Tom Hannigan sponsored a resolution requesting a special study of the highway due to fatal accidents. California Highway Patrol Special Projects set up the multi-jurisdiction group that participated in developing solutions. Special grants were sought and received for additional patrolling on the highway; billboards (driver education); publicity; etc.

The following are ideas that could be considered if a Highway 12-type planning process were followed:

Evaluate Benefits of Guardrails Installed on Highway 160 North of Paintersville Bridge: North of the Paintersville Bridge, guardrails have been installed along 1.5% of the 18 kilometers north to Freeport where the Highway leaves the levee.

Redirect Traffic between Sacramento and Contra Costa County to I-5 and State Highway 12: Some of the traffic on State Highway 160 is travel between Contra Costa County and Sacramento. That traffic could be directed with new road signs at the intersection of Highway 160 and Highway 12. The trip via Highway 12 to I-5 is 28 miles and 30 minutes. The trip via Highway 160 to River Road to Twin Cities Road to I-5 is 21 miles and 25 minutes.

Lower Speed Limit: The basic speed limit on Highway 160 is 55 miles per hour with many areas of lower speed for turns and towns. Under Section 22354.4 of the Vehicle Code, CalTrans can prepare an engineering and traffic survey and, after consultation with the California Highway Patrol. After the local Board of Supervisors has held a public hearing, CalTrans can select an appropriate speed limit (down to 25 miles per hour). The speed limit could be lowered to allow drivers to take advantage of the scenic vistas and to minimize accidents.

Increase Enforcement: Several steps could be taken to protect public safety such as additional enforcement of the existing speed limit; require lights on at all times for safety; impose double fines on Highway 160 in the Delta; add signage which warns drivers of hazards of passing and speeding. Some of these actions go beyond CalTrans authority.

Evaluate Selected Widening of Highway 160: The Project Report states "The clear recovery advisory design standard for this type of roadway is 6 meters. The California Reclamation Board is reluctant to widen or otherwise modify the configuration of this levee system due to fundamental engineering principles of levee design and poor bearing capacity of basement soils in the region. Funding and environmental compliance constraints do not make shoulder widening to accommodate the clear recovery zone design criteria a viable alternative" (page 2). However, Highway 160 was widened and some critical sharp curves eliminated in the widening project south of Highway 12 in 1993-1994. A combination project of some guardrails and some selected widening could be evaluated.

Install Guardrail on Sections of Highway 160 with the Larger Traffic Volumes: Based on CalTrans' measurement of average daily traffic, the heaviest volumes of traffic are on the most southerly portions of Highway 160. CalTrans could design a project which combines a guardrail on the sections up to Isleton Bridge and a reduced speed limit, increased enforcement, and/or driver education program in areas to the north.

Add Signage: The Commission's Plan recommends posting signs that warn of slow moving traffic in the Delta, and recommends diverting through traffic to other highways around the Delta. These recommendation were not addressed in development of the project.

The following are the Plan's finding, policy, and recommendation about Delta roadways:

Utilities and Infrastructure Finding F-8: Surface transportation in the Delta serves the agricultural operations, transporting products out the Delta to markets, and allows import of supplies and equipment. Other users of the Delta transportation network include regional trucking, regional commuters, recreational visitors, and local traffic within the Delta. Many existing Delta roads are historic, narrow, and nonconforming to present design standards. Drivers need to be aware of hazards and unique challenges that these roads pose.

Utilities and Infrastructure Policy P-5: Surface transportation in the Delta can be dangerous and congested. Roads within the Delta shall be maintained to serve the existing agricultural uses and supporting commercial uses, recreational users, and Delta residents. Where possible, commuter traffic and through traffic should be directed to surrounding highways and freeways, or minimized through programs which promote carpools, buses, or trains.

Utilities and Infrastructure Recommendation R-5: CalTrans should designate, through appropriate signage, those roadways which are used to transport agricultural equipment and other slow-moving vehicles.